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INCONCLUSIVE CHINESE COMMUNIST POLITICAL STRUGGLES DRAG ON

Propaganda attacks continue to be pressed against unnamed "rightists" in Peking and several provinces, and armed clashes between political factions continue in some areas. These and other signs of political tensions have been noted since the late March purge of three key military figures, but a clear-cut trend is still not discernible.

Mao Tse-tung's wife Chiang Ching--probably the most feared and disliked person in China today--appears to be deeply involved in the current "struggle." Selected Chinese news media have begun to single her out for highly laudatory, but defensive, attention. An editorial of 7 April published by the Peking municipal newspaper and rebroadcast by a few provincial radio stations vowed to pledge "our lives" to defend not only Mao and Lin Piao, but also Chiang Ching. Neither Peking radio nor the national newspapers have published such a pledge or even mentioned the anti-rightist drive. This suggests high-level uncertainty over the handling of such disruptive issues.

One province, Shantung, has just announced a purge of at least three senior officials associated with "counterrevolutionary double-dealers at higher levels," an apparent reference to the dismissed military leaders

in Peking. Recent poster attacks in Peking on military and civilian leaders in the Peking municipality and two northern provinces reflect ongoing political conflict in these areas.

This is also suggested by renewed reports of bitter factional fighting in several provinces and in Peking itself. Although the level of disorders generally declined in March, this trend seems to have been arrested in recent weeks. Wall posters, confirmed in part by letters, report that hundreds of persons have been killed in recent clashes in Szechwan, Shensi and Liaoning provinces.

The evidence tentatively suggests that radical forces around Mao have been trying to seize the initiative, but are facing strong resistance from elements in the army which they would rather placate than remove. For example, a recently available Red Guard newspaper reported that at a mid-March meeting with Szechwan leaders, Madame Mao and other leaders in Peking were highly critical of the 54th Army commander and other military leaders in Szechwan for supporting "conservative" groups. Yet no action has been taken against these commanders, and Mao's wife said she wanted to make clear that in spite of her criticism she was "not against the army" but was merely trying to protect her husband's interests.

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12/99